

# TYRANNY OF PRIMA DONNAS.

SHOWN MOST WHEN THEY SING IN PRIVATE HOUSES.

Trials of the Hostesses Who Hire Operatic Singers to Amuse Their Guests—Very High Prices Paid for Their Services—Result of the Mode of Hasty Dinners.

New Yorkers have come to regard as dull a dinner party which supplies only food and a private society. There must be something afterward to amuse the guests.

In one case out of ten nowadays it is bridge. That is the means adopted by persons who can afford to give a dinner but are not able to spend from \$100 to \$4,000 in keeping their guests from boredom after they have eaten.

Dinners this season have been elaborate in what they offered afterward rather than in the meal itself. Persons who go out much have decided that long dinners as well as too elaborate menus are not interesting or good form; so the meal is hurried.

In some houses one gets the impression that the dinner must be got through with at any cost and that nothing else seems so important to the hostess as finishing up. Experienced persons who put on their plates a comfortable amount of what they want to find that they are the only ones left eating.

The portions to which the others helped themselves were no larger than a teaspoonful. They have learned that one of the men will be around in a minute to take the plates away and they do not take more than they can eat in a very short time.

Where the men and women who are willing to have dinner treated as if it were something that had to be got rid of in as short a time as possible get their food is not a matter easy to decide. Women rarely eat much under any circumstances at a formal dinner and the lateness of the hour at which formal dinners are served has made afternoon tea a much more substantial refreshment than it used to be. New York teas are becoming as substantial as those in England.

As the dinner has come to be so hurried, and as the guests cannot go home at half past eight, some kind of entertainment must be provided. This usually takes the form of music in the absence of bridge or a theatre.

There have been more costly musicals this winter than ever, although they are so informal that they are not heard of except by those who attend them. When a hostess engaged a prima donna from the opera in former years to sing for her guests, the function was thought to be something enough out of the ordinary to deserve notice.

Now these parties are of almost weekly occurrence. One prima donna at the Metropolitan, who has the privilege of singing at private houses six times every season, has earned \$18,000 in this way, as her fee is \$3,000 for singing in private.

Suppose you had \$4,000 to spend in entertaining a few guests and wanted to have some of the great singers come to your house, how would you go about getting them?

To give a musicale properly requires some experience or the assistance of somebody who knows enough about music to see that the singers and the numbers suit the size of the room and the auditors. A mistake may very much interfere with the success of the evening.

Last week a prima donna of imposing appearance and a dramatic voice was the star of a private musicale. She roared out an impassioned aria that made the ceiling shake.

When she ended with an upward swoop that almost took the audience out of its seats there was a ghastly silence. The guests looked at one another with an expression of relief and immediately began to talk as if to find out whether or not they were deaf.

The soprano simpered and smirked at the piano, hoping that somebody would at least be courteous enough to applaud her a little. Then the guests realized that she had not been very politely treated, and there was faint applause from the rear of the room.

"What in the world shall I do?" the hostess asked in despair. "My party will be absolutely ruined if she does that again. Yet I cannot tell her to go more quietly."

Somebody suggested that she call out the accompanist and tell him it would sound much better if Madame would go a little slower on the high notes and be a little less dramatic. This was done. After that she went it more piano and the guests did not suffer as they might have if she had stuck to the original pace.

The contrast in the party saved it anyway. A French singer who knew how to modulate his voice to the proportions of a drawing room sang very charmingly, and the applause he received must have shown the lady sitting by the hostess that it was not necessary to yell her utmost merely because she was a prima donna.

There was another musical party the other night and the hostess engaged a prima donna who is famous for her beauty. There were to be guests at dinner and a few others were invited in at 10:15. It was not intended that there should be more than an hour of music. On the understanding that the prima donna would supply so much entertainment for the rather large sum asked for her services the lady engaged her.

"Mrs. G. can only sing two numbers," the manager said when this was mentioned to him. "They will probably not last more than twenty minutes at the outside."

In spite of her pleadings the lady could not induce the manager to commit the soprano to any more music. So she was compelled to get two other singers.

The only men who could be engaged for that night happened to be Germans, but they had to do. The concert was therefore made up of an Italian prima donna and a German tenor with the assistance of a Wagnerian bass.

The fortunate part about the cooperation of the men was that they had rarely sung before in private houses in New York and the guests enjoyed the opportunity of seeing them for the first time without their paint.

Not long ago a hostess who had engaged one of the most expensive of the stars through an agent began to be a little bit apprehensive about the party as she had had no word as to what the performers would be. She dared to call the singing lady up on the telephone to ask her if everything had been arranged.

The singer was acquainted with the hostess and came to the telephone when her maid told her who it was.

"I wanted to find out if everything was all right for Thursday night at my house," the hostess began.

"Thursday night at your house?" repeated the singer. "Why, what should I know about that?"

"But you are to sing at my musical."

# KINDERGARTEN IN A HOSPITAL.

WORK AMONG THE SICK CHILDREN AT BELLEVUE.

No Other Class Like It in the World, It Is Believed—The Enterprise Has Been So Successful That It Is Proposed to Extend the Same Benefits to Older Children.

Father, we thank Thee for the night And for the pleasant morning light, For rest and food and loving care And all that makes the day so fair.

Help us to do the things we should. To be to others kind and good. In all we do, in work or play, To grow more loving every day.

The words were being sung softly over and over. It was in the children's surgical ward of Bellevue Hospital. One of the

nurses peered over the screen about a white iron cot and saw that the singer was May, one of the kindergarten children. She was dressed in an operation gown, sitting up in bed, ready to be taken to the amphitheatre to be operated on.

The truck came in and the last words they heard her say were, "To grow more loving every day." She never came back to them; her departure made a deep and lasting impression on them all.

As for the child herself, her brief kindergarten experience had come in the light of a new gospel to her. So it has to the other children, who as patients are recruited from the poorest parts of the city.

It is believed that nowhere else in the world is just such another kindergarten as is held every afternoon in the children's surgical ward of Bellevue Hospital. It is in Ward 7, where the convalescents are detained, that the daily exercises are held.

Suffering from many afflictions, eighteen children gather around the kindergarten tables in the big room to learn the mysteries of paper folding and block building and to receive such instruction as is given them. It is a big sunny ward facing the east and overlooking the quadrangle of Bellevue.

Surrounding the kindergarten circle, over which Miss Minnie C. Vandeventer presides, is a background of little white cots. In them lie boys and girls, some strapped to boards, others swathed in bandages, one with a broken leg, another recovering from serious burns, another little fellow dying by inches with an incurable disease and still others suffering from fractured bones and wounds of one sort or another.

Of course a hospital kindergarten is quite different from any ordinary one. If the small patients whose white cribs line the walls are very ill then the morning songs must be abandoned, and if the kindergarten children themselves are convalescing from fractured limbs then they cannot enter into active games, and so the finger plays and others must be introduced instead.

It has been in operation some two years, having been started as an experiment by the Board of Education, and is an annex to Public School 14, in Dr. Stitt's district. Its success has been so marked that Dr. John W. Brannan, president of the Board of Trustees of Bellevue, contemplates asking for an extension of the work to include the older children of the hospital, many of whom are obliged to remain there for many weary weeks and even months.

In speaking of the advantages of the kindergarten Dr. Brannan said: "No one knows what a blessing the kindergarten has been to these children."

Some of the singers at the Metropolitan and at the Manhattan as well as at liberty to make their own concert arrangements, but the majority of them are under sole contract to Mr. Conried or Mr. Hammerstein. The impresarios charge for their services whatever they see fit.

The charge is usually much in advance of the fee the artist actually receives. Mr. Grau sometimes got more than twice as much as the fee paid to the singer. One of the Conried prima donnas sang last week in a private house and her fee was twice what she receives from the opera house. Those artists who make their own arrangements in regard to private concerts invariably receive more than they demand for appearances on the stage.

That the regular operators should have so much of the singers in the theatre and yet want to engage them for appearances in their homes, frequently astounds people who suppose that they might like a little variety. This winter there has been greater demand than ever for the artists from the music halls.

They are sometimes of a sufficiently refined and contained style to sing in a drawing room. They are more of a novelty than the singers from the opera houses and do not cost nearly so much; nor are they so exigent in the matter of etiquette.

**SALTING DUCK MARSHES.**

Practice Condemned by Hunters. We Call It Barnyard Sport.

A California newspaper chronicles the prowess of a large number of mighty ninny-rodos who recently killed the limit number of ducks on various preserve grounds previously baited with food which had made the birds tame and unresponsive.

This "barnyard sport" does not appeal to a Recreation correspondent, who objects to unnecessary slaughter, even if the law does admit the killing of half a hundred ducks.

The practice of "salting" duck marshes and lakes with corn and other grain, and then "burning them out" on the opening day is simply a phase of the degeneracy of latter-day duck shooting.

The birds get so that they will come in for the grain like chickens at the call of a housewife. It requires no hunting skill to find the game and it is so ridiculously tame from non-molestation and constant feeding at the baited points that the shooting is about as difficult as shooting at a poultry show and killing a rooster.

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